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Request to Community Development and Recreation Committee

The purpose of the Community Development & Recreation Committee is to monitor and make recommendations to strengthen services to communities and neighbourhoods. With this in mind I would like to ask the CDRC to request a study of the social and economic impact of contracting out cleaning and custodial work in City facilities.

The City of Toronto has signalled its intention to contract out cleaning services at Toronto Police Stations, the Toronto Community Housing Corporation and City child care centres. There has also been an indication that further contracting out of cleaning jobs is imminent. Up to a thousand jobs could conceivably be contracted out, as the process extends to other city properties including City of Toronto long-term care facilities. The impact and its direct effect on residents and neighbourhoods has not been determined. This is a very serious matter.

City Council needs to know what the impact would be on neighbourhoods in order to make informed decisions about contracts that total millions of dollars. In fact, Standing Committees, like the CDRC, haven't had a chance to debate this issue at all. The final decisions about contracting out these services will go only to the Bid Committee. Councillors and City Council, sitting as a whole, will not be part of the decision-making process. These jobs and services need to be studied, evaluated and reported to City Council.

Economic impact

The growth of precarious employment has been noted as a serious concern by organizations as varied as the International Labour Organization -- to the United Way and the Toronto Community Foundation. City of Toronto cleaners earn a living wage and contribute to their neighbourhoods and to the city as a whole. Given that the cleaning sector is a place where multiple waves of immigrants have found work, these jobs provide access to economic stability and social mobility

for newcomers.

The loss of up to a thousand jobs that pay a living wage will create a significant impact that has not been considered fully by City Council. Replacing these jobs with private cleaning contractors that are likely to pay cleaners barely above minimum wage will result in more people, particularly vulnerable immigrant populations, not being able to afford to live in Toronto.

Middle incomes in Toronto have dropped significantly in the past 30 years while poverty has risen as a result of unstable and precarious jobs. Such income polarization and widening inequality has led to “three cities within Toronto.”ⁱ This trend of rapid segregation of neighbourhoods according to socio-economic status is a threat to the social cohesion as well as the overall inclusiveness and health of our city.

By sharp contrast, most cleaners in the private sector have to take on two or in some cases even three jobs, to ensure that their families barely survive. Low wages and minimal or no training is a reality in private cleaning companies. On the worst end, some companies even misclassify employees to evade employment standards requirements and bypass the Fair Wage policy.

Public Health & Safety Impact

Whether it is security at the Police Stations, or cleanliness standards that Toronto parents value at City child care centres, public health and safety could be affected. The cleaners currently employed by the City of Toronto are provided with appropriate equipment and safety training to sanitize City property such as jail cells in the police stations. Private cleaning companies are not accountable for public health and safety in the same way.

This needs further study. As a Councillor I need more information. As a member of City Council we need to have a complete review. I am therefore putting forward the following recommendation:

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Community Development and Recreation Committee request:

1. That the Executive Director of Social Development, Finance and Administration, and the General Manager of Employment and Social Services, undertake a study, in consultation with the Medical Officer of Health, on the social impact of hundreds of jobs being performed at salaries that are barely above minimum wage, often with no benefits, and particularly the impact on priority neighbourhoods;
2. That the study is presented to City Council.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ana Bailão', with a period at the end.

Ana Bailão
City Councillor
Ward 18, Davenport

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Hulchanski, David J. "The Three Cities within Toronto: Income polarization among Toronto's neighbourhoods, 1970-2000," December 2007. Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto. Research Bulletin 41.